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## JARED SPARKS, LL.D.

[Communicated for the New England Historical and Genealogical Register for July, 1866,  
by WILLIAM B. TRASK.]

SPARKS, Jared, LL.D., a resident member, died at Cambridge March 14, 1866, aged 76. He was born in Willington, Conn., May 10, 1789. He was one of the many self-made men of our day who have become renowned in the land, working themselves upward through trials and difficulties, from obscurity to the highest positions. In his boyhood he labored on a farm, tending at intervals a grist and saw mill in the neighborhood. In his native village he received the rudiments of a good common school education. A copy of the now obsolete Guthrie's geography, in which he had become interested, proved a stimulant to him in that line of studies; and other elementary works that fell in his way at his country home, were made subservient to the high-minded boy in his intense cravings for knowledge. He became apprenticed to a carpenter, and with his fore-plane, broad axe and saw, might be seen at early morn, wending his way to his daily toil. For two years he labored in this honest mechanical employment, but his love of study was greater far than the love of the business in which his hands were then engaged. He was destined, altogether unknown and undreamed of to others and to himself, to become a distinguished architect in the temple of literature and of fame, and to preside over that institution, his afterward loving alma mater, which for more than two centuries has been copiously pouring out streams of knowledge for the enlightenment of its favored recipients. Jared's employer, with a due regard to the tastes and proclivities of the embryo student, relinquished his claim on his services. The young man became, at once, a schoolmaster in the town of Tolland, situated on the westerly side of the Willimantic river. Here he taught in the winter, and in the summer returned to his former avocation. The Rev. Hubbel Loomis, a clergyman of Willington, having had his attention drawn to the young man, instructed him in mathematics, in which Mr. Loomis was well versed, and induced him to study Latin. In return for his kindness, and as compensation in part for tuition and board, he shingled the good minister's barn. It soon became manifest to the neighbors that young Sparks was a lad of more than ordinary promise. He was accordingly encouraged by the more prominent among them, to prosecute his studies and to put himself in the way of obtaining, as was befitting him, a collegiate education. The Rev. Abiel Abbot, late of Peterboro', N. H., aided him in securing a scholarship at the Phillips Academy, Exeter, on a charitable foundation, so that he was thereby provided with a home and instruction, free of expense. He travelled to Coventry, to confer with Mr. Abbot, who was then minister in that town. He went from thence on foot, to Exeter in New Hampshire, where the pedestrian duly arrived, at the end of the fourth day, covered with dust, and wearied doubtless by his long travel. This was in 1809. He was placed under the care of the celebrated classical scholar, Dr. Benjamin Abbott, who was then and for many years after the Principal of that noted seminary. He remained at this institution two years, teaching school one winter in the town of Rochester, N. H. Among his fellow students at Exeter, were John Gorham Palfrey, afterwards a classmate with him at Cambridge, and George Bancroft, who entered the college two years subsequently to Mr. Sparks. It is a somewhat singular fact that this trio of American historians, should in their early years have been companions at the same seat of learning, and together received the initiatory instruction which has ripened into a fruitful harvest of results in a similar field of literature.

He entered Harvard College in 1811, at the mature age of 22, a period of life when graduates usually have made a beginning of their professional studies. He was an especial favorite of President Kirkland, who was very kind to the young man.

“From the first, Dr. Kirkland recognized the rare qualities of his pupil, and was fond of predicting the distinction of his future course.” He assisted him to a scholarship, the resources of which Mr. Sparks eked out by district school-keeping a portion of the year in New England, and an engagement in the first two years of his undergraduate course at a private school, as far off as Havre de Grace, in Maryland, to which he was recommended by President Dwight of Yale. While in this latter place it was invaded by the British troops in 1813. Before the assault he served in the militia, and remained to witness the conflagration of the town. He returned to Harvard College, where he graduated in 1815. After teaching a classical school in Lancaster, Mass., he went back to Cambridge and studied Divinity under Rev. Henry Ware, D.D. While prosecuting his theological studies, he was also in 1817 appointed, by the college, Tutor in mathematics and natural philosophy, subjects in which he was well versed, his strongest predilections at college, it is said, being in their favor. His memoir on the physical discoveries of Sir Isaac Newton, which gained for him the Bowdoin prize in his senior year, is spoken of as “a masterpiece of analytic exposition, philosophical method, and lucid and exact statement.” *The North American Review* had been established about two years previous, by Wm. Tudor, and Mr. T. now assigned the work to several associates, one of whom was Mr. Sparks, who became its working editor. Two years after, in May, 1819, he was ordained pastor of the Unitarian church in Baltimore, Maryland, which had then been recently established, chiefly by natives of New England who had settled in the monumental city. Rev. Dr. Channing, of Boston, delivered the discourse. It was the day of Unitarian controversy, and Mr. Sparks felt impelled to buckle on his armor and defend the faith, as he understood it, against the stalwart champions of the so-called orthodox views, by whom he was so strongly surrounded. Among these antagonists was the celebrated Rev. Samuel Miller, D.D., of Princeton, N. J., and the Rev. William E. Wyatt, D.D., of the Episcopal church in Baltimore, both of whom were replied to in an earnest manner by the Unitarian Divine, whose productions were given to the press. One of these volumes on Episcopacy was published in 1820. In 1821, he was elected chaplain to the House of Representatives, at Washington. The same year he commenced a monthly periodical in duodecimo form, entitled *The Unitarian Miscellany and Christian Monitor*, which was continued two years, during his stay at Baltimore. His series of Letters to Rev. Dr. Miller, enlarged, was published at Boston, in 1823. A *Collection of Essays and Tracts in Theology, from various Authors, with Biographical and Critical Notices*, was commenced in Baltimore and completed at Boston in 1826, in six duodecimo volumes.

After a ministry of four years in Baltimore, the physical powers of Mr. Sparks became impaired. He relinquished his ministerial labors, and travelled a short time in the Western States for his health. Returning to Boston he purchased *The North American Review*, and became its sole editor. Under his direction this now famous quarterly was ably conducted. “He was wise in the choice of his subjects, and conscientious and thorough in their treatment.” He published, in 1828, a *Life of John Ledyard, the American Traveller*, which has since been included in his series of American Biography. After nine years of preparation, his great work, *The Writings of George Washington*—in pursuance of which he had examined, personally, papers in the public offices of the thirteen original States and the department at Washington, securing the Washington papers at Mount Vernon, transcribing documents in the archives at London and Paris, which were then for the first time opened for historical purposes—his great work, we repeat, was consummated. It was published in successive volumes from 1834 to 1837. The first volume, *The Life of Washington*, has been issued separately. In 1829-30, he published, with the aid of Congress, a series of twelve octavo volumes, the *Diplomatic Correspondence of the American Revolution*. In 1830, he originated *The American Almanac and Repository of Useful Knowledge*, the first volume of which was edited by him. This work was continued by others until 1861 inclusive, making thirty-two consecutive volumes of one of the most valuable publications of the times. In 1832, he published *The Life of Gouverneur Morris*. Of the *Library of American Biography*, conducted by Mr. Sparks, containing sixty lives, eight were written by him. Two series of the work were published, the first of ten volumes from 1834 to 1838, the second of fifteen from 1844 to 1848. In 1840, *The Works of Benjamin Franklin*, in ten volumes; and in 1853, *The Correspondence of the American Revolution*, in four volumes, appeared. An accession, therefore, was made to our libraries through these works of Mr. Sparks, of sixty volumes of literature of national interest.

Mr. Sparks was McLean Professor of Ancient and Modern History at Harvard



College, from 1839 to 1849; and from 1849 to 1852 was President of that Institution, which position he was compelled to relinquish on account of ill health.

From a notice of Mr. Sparks in the *New York Independent*—a paper of different theological views from those held by Mr. S.—we copy the following. “Amid the glare and rush of American life, his career of quiet energy and faithful working deserves to be held in grateful and honorable remembrance. He was known, at first, chiefly by his zeal and vigor as a religious controversialist. But he had no sectarian tendencies in his nature. His efforts as a partisan were merely the accidents of his position. After leaving Baltimore, he was little known as a theologian. He gradually lost his interest in dogmas, but never ceased to cultivate the virtues of the Christian life.” “His fairness of mind was proverbial. He made no enemies, and all who knew him were his friends.” “If he was not the man to take the public by storm with the gifts of the imagination and eloquence, he has left the remembrance of a beautiful scholarly life, which it is of wholesome influence to cherish.”

Mr. Sparks married, Oct. 16, 1832, Frances Anne, daughter of William Allen, Esq., of Hyde Park, N. Y. She died of consumption at Hyde Park, July 12, 1835, leaving one daughter, Maria Verplank. This daughter died in Cambridge, Jan. 3, 1846, aged 12 years 4 months. Mr. Sparks married, May 21, 1839, Mary Crowningshield, dau. of Hon. Nathaniel Silsbee, of Salem, Mass. There are now living, four children, one son and three daughters: Florence; William Eliot, b. in Cambridge Oct. 19, 1847, a member of the Freshman Class, Harvard College; Elizabeth, b. in Cambridge, May 1, 1849; Beatrice, b. in Cambridge, March 26, 1851.

He became a resident member of this Society in 1846. See a pleasant notice of Mr. Sparks, with a list of his works, in the *Historical Magazine* for May, p. 146, written by Mr. Wm. R. Deane.













